

Where is the King?

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

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Williamsburg Christian Reformed Church

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Morning Service

“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?” That’s the question we asked so long ago, when we came to Jerusalem. “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?” It’s a question that stirred up a lot of trouble—tragedy in fact. A crime against humanity.

But the answer led us to find a baby all right—but in circumstances that one would never have expected for such a royal child. For one who is the Lord of Lords and King of kings.

But before I tell you the whole story, let me introduce myself. My name is Caspar and I was one of the three Magi who made that long journey nearly forty years ago. I was the youngest and I am the only one left of the three of us to tell this story. But it’s a story, we’ve told many a time.

I’ve lived here in Persia my whole life and that journey to Jerusalem was the only time I left Persia. We, Persians, are proud of the fact that we were not conquered by the Romans. And so, crossing the border and making the long journey was a huge undertaking. So you might wonder why we risked so much just to find a baby child?

Well, as Magi, we seek wisdom and understanding. That’s our full-time profession. We’re more than astrologers—though that is an important part of what we do. We look to the stars for insight about the future. (Though to be honest after our encounter with the Child, we focused less and less on that means of gaining wisdom). But our goal as Magi is to make sense of the world in which we live.

Isn’t that something that we all have to do? We all have to answer the basic questions of life: Who am I? Why am I here? Is this life all there is or is there more than just this material world? Is death simply the end? We all have to answer these questions, but as Magi we have the privilege of making this our full time profession. The Greeks have their philosophers, but we Persians have Magi.

And so we studied from all kinds of sources that can be placed in two categories: nature and the sacred books. The three of us specialized in the sacred books of the Jews. When we Persians conquered the Babylonians, over five hundred years earlier, one the key Jewish leaders—Daniel—served in our courts. He too was called a Magi. Through him, we gained access to their sacred Scriptures.

I was the one who became fastened with one line from Numbers 24:17, “A Star will come out of Jacob.” The more I studied their sacred books, the more I was convinced that it spoke about a great king—one different than any other king. As a result, I searched the heavens for a special star. Night after night, I peered into the sky—until one night, there it was. A new star. A special star.

I shared my discovery with Melchor and Balthasar and convinced them that this star would lead us to a newborn baby. Not just any child, but a king. Not just any king, a special kind of king. And so off we went, over a thousand kilometers with our camels—it took us a couple of months to get to our destination.

As it turned out, the star could only bring us so far. It brought us to Jerusalem, where we asked that question: Where is the one born king of the Jews? We needed a more precise answer. Nature couldn’t give us that. For that we needed more direction from the sacred books. The answer was given to us from the book of Isaiah and we were directed towards Bethlehem.

And so I learned that nature can provide some answers to the meaning of life, but the more precise answers come from the sacred words of scripture. Nature is too general of a revelation; we needed a special revelation to find the Child. Sure you can still look to the night sky, and raise the questions: Who made these stars and why? Who is mere mortal man in the vastness of the universe? Pondering the stars raises those questions. But I have discovered that answers only come from the sacred pages.

Anyhow, we ended up in the capital, Jerusalem, asking our question. We quickly ended up in the court of King Herod. After all, our entrance into the city drew a lot of attention. It’s not every day visitors from the East came into this backwater city of a capital.

We were eager to see King Herod. After all, it made sense that a royal child would be born in a royal palace, in the royal city. But no baby was born to Herod’s household. And it soon became clear that Herod wasn’t the type of king that would produce the type of royal child we were looking for. He was a ruthless man. A man whose only desire was to hold on to power. We soon heard stories about how he even murdered three of his own sons

because he saw them as a threat to his kingship. I couldn't imagine how the type of king we were looking for could in any way be related to him.

No wonder Herod was disturbed when he heard the question we raised: Where is the one who has been born a king? He won't tolerate any upstart from claiming a throne, even if we're only talking about a young child. But he was crafty. When he too heard the answer, Bethlehem, he didn't immediately go there to find the child himself. Anyone could see Herod coming and hid.

So he tried to use us to get the precise location. He took us aside and got some more detailed information about the star first appeared. He tried to get us to become his spies—oh, that crafty Herod. Thankfully, we never followed through on what he asked. Later on though, we heard about the massacre that took place—that cruel Herod.

It fills my heart with grief to consider this dark side of the story. But you do need to know about this dark side. Life, as you know, is full of evil and injustice. It's full of those who are opposed to goodness and righteousness. Not everyone welcomed this royal child and what he stood for. You need to be aware of that. There is a dark side to the story.

But I don't want to dwell on that aspect too long today. I want to get to the more joyous part. To the part where we find this royal baby. Despite Herod's cruel scheming, those he gathered together did send us in the right direction. Off to Bethlehem we went. The star re-appeared and we were led to a house, where we discovered a baby, with his mother Mary.

Now as you can imagine, what we saw was not what we expected when we first set out. We were looking for a royal child, whose birth was so special and significant that a star appeared in the sky for him. So what would you have expected to find? A royal palace, with a special baby room. A royal staff, with plenty of guards and servants. But we found nothing like that.

Instead, we discovered a very basic house, which we learned was an immense improvement from the stable in which the baby was born. A stable for a king?! Even this house was a far cry from the royal palace King Herod lived in. And there were no servants, no guards. Just Mary. Joseph was out working, when we first arrived, trying to make ends meet.

Now you might think that we would have doubted the leading of the star, that we would have questioned the answer of the sacred word, that we might have thought that we were duped into a wild goose chase that ended with just a peasant baby. But we didn't. This was where we were led by God's revelation in nature and in his word. Despite all outward

circumstances, we recognized this child to be a special king. We accepted it in faith.

Faith is required. In faith, we could see beyond the humble surroundings of this child and recognized in him, the King of kings and Lord of Lords. Faith is required. When it seems that the Herod's of this world, with their cruel and crafty ways, are in control, it takes faith to see that God is doing something different. That He is doing something different through this child. Faith is required.

In faith, we saw in the child Jesus, a King. So what did we do? Well, what do you before royalty? We bowed down. That was an act of submission. We went on our knees in recognition that the one who was before us was greater than we were, more powerful than we were, more knowledgeable than we were.

We bowed down and worshipped. Yes, worshipped. I suppose you might think that it was easy for us pagan Magi to worship a child. But it wasn't. We worshipped because we could detect a sense of deity in this child. Now that was going far beyond what we expected to discover when we set out on this journey. But through all what we experienced and from what we heard from Mary and Joseph we sensed that this child bore the marks of divinity. This was a holy child. This was the Son of God. And so, we worshipped.

And we also gave gifts. We came prepared. We had our gifts of gold, incense and myrrh. I'm not sure how the last two was of any practical benefit to Jesus, as they are intended to create a great smelling aroma. But then, after being born in a barn, with its stench, perhaps Mary at least could have appreciated a pleasant fragrance. The gold, definitely, came in handy, as this family was dirt poor. We realized our gifts were but tokens of our submission to this King.

We didn't stay long. We were soon back on our way home, but this time, we avoided Jerusalem and King Herod. We had found what we were looking for: a king. We found more than what we were looking for: we found the Savior of the World.

Do you consider yourselves wise? Are you searching for the truth? Are you trying to find answers to the basic questions of life, in a mixed up, troubled world? We were. And we found the answer in the strangest of places. The star we followed to get to that answer is long gone. But the sacred words remain. Follow them.

Follow the sacred words and find this king, just as we did. He wasn't an ordinary king. He didn't grow up to conquer with the sword as the Romans did. He didn't use deceit and cruel acts to gain power, as Herod did.

From our Jewish contacts, we heard about what happened after we left. The massacre of the boys of Bethlehem. The cruel death of Jesus on the cross. But also the amazing news of his resurrection and ascension to glory.

It confirmed to us that this child was no ordinary king. But he was and is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. One whose wisdom and knowledge surpasses all of us. One whose power and authority surpasses all the kings of the world. One seeks to overcome the evil and injustices of this world. One who ushers in a kingdom of peace.

Find that king. Faith will be required.

And how do you respond to such a king? Well, you can do what we did. You can bow down in submission. You can worship. And you can give your all.